

## About Eldridge

Eldridge is the name of the place where the state facility known as the Sonoma Developmental Center, or SDC, is located. There is some confusion caused by the fact that, although it has its own post office, Eldridge is completely contained within the boundaries of Glen Ellen. Eldridge is a unique place therefore within Glen Ellen, yet set apart— rather like Golden Gate Park in San Francisco. When the facility known as SDC is gone, the place we call Eldridge will still be there, so it would be fitting to begin referring to it as Eldridge rather than SDC. As people came to work at the facility in Eldridge, which was originally at some distance from the village of Glen Ellen, a neighborhood began developing nearby. Because Glen Ellen was the nearest commercial region, where shops, saloons and services were available, the neighborhood identified with Glen Ellen as their town although the residents worked in Eldridge.

At first the facility had been named “The California Home for the Care and Training of Feeble Minded Children”, but in 1909 the name was changed to “The Sonoma State Home”, and in 1953 it was renamed “The Sonoma State Hospital”. It was not until 1986 that the name became “The Sonoma Developmental Center”, or SDC. According to GEHS records, “The facility was founded as a private institution and was first opened at San Jose, later at Sulphur Springs at Vallejo [in 1884]. Soon, outgrowing that site and realizing greater funding was needed the institution was turned over to the State of California and temporarily moved to Alameda and from there to Santa Clara [in 1885]. Again it was evident that more acreage was needed as the population had grown from 20 in 1884 to 108 in 1889. In 1889 funds were appropriated by the state for the purchase of at least 500 acres for the institution. Captain Oliver Eldridge and George Gibbs began the search. They found a beautiful 1670 acre ranch just south of Glen Ellen. The land was owned by Ex Senator William McPherson Hill . The ranch was acquired for \$51,000.” Captain Oliver Eldridge was a distinguished member of a well-known Cape Cod seafaring family; he skippered sailing ships around the Horn from New York to San Francisco. After retiring from the sea Captain Eldridge became a member of the Geographical Society of the Pacific, California Board of Pilot commissioners, and a member of the Associated Charities of San Francisco. He was commissioned, along with George Gibbs, to find a permanent location for the institution, and was honored for his work by having the place named after him.